



International Mission Board

TOM ELLIFF, PRESIDENT



Our command

During a recent trip to Japan, I sat with International Mission Board personnel as we listened intently to missionary Tak Oue translate the story of an 82-year-old Japanese pastor. Tak and his wife Anna were taking several of us to view the encouraging results of disaster response to the earthquake and tsunami that ravaged the eastern coast of Japan on March 11, 2011.

Nearing the coastal area, we had stopped to meet the humble, self-effacing pastor. His story powerfully refreshed my thinking about our call to share the Gospel to the very ends of the earth and the importance of unquestioning obedience.

Trained at the age of 15 to be a kamikaze pilot in World War II, then despondent because the war had ended before he could give his life in service to his country, the pastor had wandered the streets searching for food. There, the young man's attention had been drawn to a street preacher loudly proclaiming the Gospel.

Using his food money, he purchased a Bible from which he read for the next two years before meeting a Southern Baptist missionary. Our missionary first led him to Christ then offered sustained guidance and help.

It was a simple statement by the old preacher that reminded me of every believer's call to share the Gospel. "We were trained to listen

to coded instructions as we flew the planes," he said, "but we were never trained to respond."

I thought of the sign on the wall of a lifeboat station urging rescuers to remember that while there is the command to "go out," there is no command to "return." Now, here I was sitting in the presence of a man who had been trained to "take off" in an airplane, but not trained to land. He had been trained to listen, but not to protest.

We are blessed to have a Lord who not only commands us to "go out," but eagerly listens to our hearts throughout the journey, then safely guides us home. Still, there is something so stirring about unquestioning obedience.

I desire an obedient heart like my pastor friend in Japan. It will be through an obedient heart that I become Christ's heart, hands and voice in this world that so desperately needs Him.

For this world to be mightily changed by the grace of God, we will need a generation that is willing to "take off" and let God handle the landing, and to "listen" to His commands without protest. Will you join me in giving sacrificially to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering so the next generation of missionaries can fulfill their calling?

Just as the pastor prayed for me, I am praying for you. Join me in being His heart, His hands, and His voice!

The life of a 'do-er'

"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.' (Matthew 9:35-38, NIV.)

I have a confession. I've always been a do-er. I have a difficult time sitting back and simply observing when I see something that needs to be corrected.

I have friends who love to debate politics, sports, and theology. They get all excited analyzing the pros and cons of the latest technology, what's wrong with their boss, or how they feel about the latest issue at church.

While some of them will seek resolution or change, most of them just love the debate. I can only take so much debate, and then I want to fix it.

I think that desire is part of the reason I became a nurse. Nurses are generally do-ers. If a nurse stood over your hospital bed and only debated the pros and cons of the latest prescribed treatment, you might never get well. Good nurses analyze quickly and then act.

As followers of Christ, I recognize there is a time for us to study, debate the Scriptures, and even argue over approaches for reaching people with the Gospel — but eventually there comes a point where the debate stops and we heed Christ's call to action.

Yes, Jesus faced questions, even debate at times, over His teaching and His challenges to existing culture. He wisely used those instances to instruct those who might be watching and listening. Not only did He bring clarity to issues people were facing about everyday life, He provided insight to how all His followers are to live based on Scripture.

From the moment He called each of the disciples, they witnessed how much of His earthly ministry was spent preaching, teaching, healing, and meeting other physical needs. The Gospel of Matthew tells us, "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues,



Guest opinion
with Wanda Lee

preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field' (Matthew 9:35-38, NIV).

There's an appropriate time for discussion and debate, but Jesus is calling for workers in His harvest field. You and I are called to be people of action, a voice for justice and salvation among the many who do not know the one true source of peace.

We've been called to give of our resources and our time, and to commit ourselves totally to His calling. As we pray and give during this season of the year, let's especially remember those who have committed their lives to following the Great Commission into all the world, preaching and teaching and healing, so the Gospel will be proclaimed among all people.

I think it's OK to be a do-er. The time to act is now. Let's go to the harvest field together and make a difference for Christ.

Lee is executive director of the Women's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention, headquartered in Birmingham.

Baptist Record

Editor:
William H. Perkins Jr.
wperkins@mbcb.org

Associate Editor:
Tony Martin
tmartin@mbcb.org

Layout/Design
Megan Young
myoung@mbcb.org

Editor Emeritus
Don McGregor



BAPTISTS

Advertising
Emily Jones
ejones@mbcb.org

Circulation Manager
Brandi Quattlebaum
bquattlebaum@mbcb.org

Editor Emeritus
Don McGregor

Baptist Record
Advisory Committee:
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Jackson, MS
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Tel: (662) 323-3800
Fax: (662) 323-3330
E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org

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Missionaries train, equip church planters in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Nepal (BP) — "No one accepted us," says Agni Amrit (not his real name), hanging his head so low it almost rests on his checkered tie.

Amrit asked 10 people in Kathmandu, Nepal, if he could share a story about his God. Everyone he approached told him to sit. No one wanted to hear about another God. They already have plenty in Hinduism.

"You were rejected 10 times," repeats Drew Neely (not his real name) an International Mission Board representative and church-planting trainer. Amrit nods.

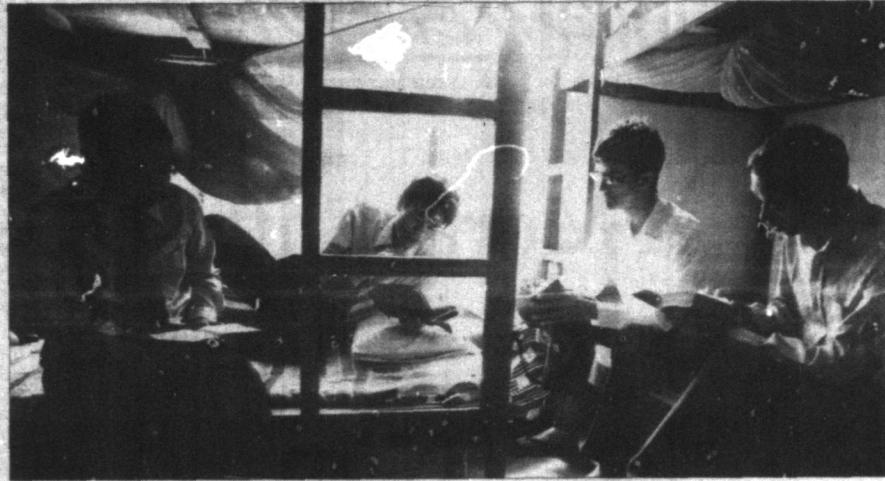
"I hope that gives you joy," Neely says, pausing for Amrit to meet his gaze. "Brother, when those 10 people rejected you, you shared in the suffering of Christ and that should be cause for rejoicing."

Both Neely and Amrit feel called by God to be His heart, hands, and voice and see new churches start in Nepal. Amrit is a Nepalese student at a Bible college in Kathmandu. Neely is an American who teaches Nepalese believers how to effectively plant new churches. They met after Neely was asked to teach the Bible college students how to plant churches.

Neely hopes that as a result of training at the college, a few of the students will take up the calling to help see the Great Commission fulfilled in Nepal.

Neely doesn't intend to train the Bible college students and walk away. The training is designed to help him spot those called as church planters, those he'll continue to disciple.

At the training he found Am-



JOURNEY OF JOY — Bible college students in Kathmandu, Nepal, practice a house church model in their dorm room. (BP photo)

rit, a former drug addict who grew up in a Hindu and Sikh family. His mother was healed after she believed in God.

"I went to church, but I never believed in God because I thought that was my responsibility to go, just because of my mother," Amrit says.

A pastor asked Amrit if he knew about the sin in his life. Amrit didn't realize his sin condemned him. He soon made a commitment to follow Christ. Now, he's a little older, has a faint shadow of a moustache, and hopes to plant a church that will minister to his drug addict friends.

Amrit says Neely's training showed him how to reach out to

his friends. He's learned effective ways to share the Gospel, how to find someone to invest in, and how to disciple in a way that leads to church multiplication.

During a training session, Neely invited Amrit and his classmates to join him in a journey of joy. "I'm pleading you, for your joy, and the joy of those people who will come to know Christ... take this and make it a part of your life and for the glory of God," Neely tells the students.

Accepting the call to plant churches, Neely says, sometimes will lead students to unfamiliar territory and far-flung villages. "I'm going to warn you, the Jeep ride is going to be hot and bumpy and long and your dahl bat [a

popular Nepalese dish made from lentils] isn't going to taste like what your momma makes."

"It's going to be difficult and the culture is going to be different and you are going to suffer, but in exchange for that suffering you get to tell someone who has never heard the Gospel about Jesus Christ."

At the end of the training, Neely gave a final call to the students. "Are you the grain that's willing to fall to the ground and die to self so that a great harvest could emerge from your life and influence?" Neely asks, as he looks around the room at each student.

The room is silent, save for the whirring of the fan. Amrit nods

his head yes. He understands the gravity of the situation. He's already been rejected 10 times, but he knows it's worth it.

"God, I am ready to obey Your Word. Even if it costs my life, I don't care," Amrit says he told God. "If you think I am worthy of suffering for you, worthy of the Gospel, worthy to suffer for the Gospel, if you think that I am worthy, you can use me anytime."

Finding joy in the midst of suffering is something both Amrit and Neely learned through radical obedience.

Amrit says it's sometimes hard to be around his friends because they don't understand his new life. There have been taunts and teases, but Amrit's resolve hasn't changed. He sees the struggles as a cause for joy because he gets to tell his addict friends about Jesus.

Like Amrit, Neely has found joy in obedience and perseverance. At the close of a rest period in the U.S., Neely knew God wanted him to return to South Asia to serve. Neely and his family packed their suitcases and boarded a Pacific-bound plane.

Because of the family's obedience, Amrit and dozens of other Nepalese now have a vision and a plan to reach their people with the Gospel. Equipped by Neely's training, the third-year Bible college student is going home to embark on a 14-month internship in church planting out in the Wild West of Nepal, where Christ is still an enigma.

Even if he runs into more rejection, Amrit says he has joy because he's becoming more like Jesus.

Avowed atheist turns life around after encounter with missionaries

CENTRAL ASIA (BP) — Omar Khan (not his real name) loved his father, but he didn't buy his old man's Islamic religion. In his early 30s, Khan was a self-proclaimed atheist. He didn't believe in any god, especially Allah.

Out of respect, Khan would listen politely as his father waxed philosophical about the mysteries of the Quran, a nearly threadbare topic during their frequent road trips to the city to buy merchandise for the family's small clothes shop.

One mystery in particular plagued the elder Khan. Why did the Quran refer to Jesus as the Spirit of God? Didn't that mean Jesus was God? Khan's father never got his answer, at least not in this life.

Khan was walking about 20 yards behind his father in one of the capital city's crowded markets when he tripped over a curb. A split-second after Khan hit the ground, a violent explosion rippled through the market — a rebel rocket attack.

Dazed by the blast, Khan picked himself up and tried to make sense of what he saw. Dead bodies lay all around him, not just bodies but scattered bits and pieces of charred and bloody remains. Khan looked at the spot where his father had stood only moments before. It was a smoking crater. He filled a plastic bag from one of the

shops with chunks of flesh. Khan didn't know which pieces belonged to his father, but he wanted to give his mother something to bury. He held the bag in his arms during the seven-hour bus ride home.

"Mother, here is my father," Khan remembers saying as he offered her the bloody bag, sobbing uncontrollably. This was all that was left of the person he loved more fiercely than any other in the world but what Khan didn't yet realize was just how much of his father lived on through him, including the question he had planted deep within his son's heart: Who is Jesus?

Little did Khan know, God was already preparing him for the answer. Within a year of his father's death, Khan found himself wrestling with yet another spiritual question. By chance, he'd met a Western Christian who told him that God loves him, a concept foreign to a Muslim, much less an atheist.

"How does God love me? He didn't give me any money or anything," Khan wondered. As his relationship with his Christian friend grew, Khan was given a New Testament Bible translated into the local language.

"I put it on the cupboard," Khan remembers. "I said, 'This thing is a lot of

history. I don't want to read this.'

That night he had an unusual dream. A man dressed in white came to him. His face made of light. He was carrying the New Testament Bible Khan had received earlier that day, wrapped in a white handkerchief.

"He asked me, 'Why didn't you read this book?' Khan says. He remembers ignoring the man, explaining that he had lots of books and didn't want to waste time on ancient stories. The man in white persisted, asking Khan to read just one page. "Maybe it will help you," he told Khan, and the dream ended.

When Khan awoke the next morning, the New Testament he'd placed on top of the cupboard was next to his pillow, wrapped neatly in a white handkerchief.

"Hey, did you put this book here?" Khan asked his wife. "She said, 'No.' I said, 'Please try to find out if somebody came inside my room [last night].'" She said, "No. Nobody came to you."

Remembering his dream, he decided to honor the man's request to read a single page. Khan didn't know where to start. He opened the Bible to 1 Corinthians 14, but he didn't stop at one page. He read everything — first, the whole chapter, then the entire book. "On that day I think God

touched my heart," Khan says.

He took the New Testament and the handkerchief to his brother, Amir (not his real name) and told him about the dream. Amir thought he was crazy, but Khan convinced him they should read the Bible together.

Within days the men knew they needed to talk to someone. They called their Christian friend and invited her for dinner. "We asked her, 'How can we know this Book? ... This is a good Book,'" Khan says.

Since it was inappropriate for a woman to disciple a man, she connected Khan and Amir with a Western Christian man who began to meet with them every two weeks to guide them through the Gospel. After a year and a half of study, both Khan and Amir accepted Jesus and were baptized.

"We started to share our ideas (about the Gospel) with our friends," Khan says. That's when the trouble began. At that time, Islamic radicals were attempting to overthrow the government. It seemed like anyone was a potential target, especially Christians.

"A lot of people were being killed," explains Khan, who says he personally helped bury 45 people during the violence. "It was a very bad time... every night. I had bad dreams and was afraid."

Our recent Presidential election, as do most elections, left a concession by one candidate and a euphoric celebration by the other candidate. President Barack Obama re-elected for four more years had hardly finished his speech until every eye in the land was focusing on the fiscal cliff. I am not going to discuss it here or add to all of the conversation that takes place 24/7 by the news media. But regardless of whom you are or what you know about it, it is going to affect you and your family. Simply stated, it is the economic mess that has been cultivated in our nation in virtually every sector of society. It is converging to take place as the New Year begins. In addition, it is significant to note that the people who are entrusted with the responsibility of fixing it are in large measure those responsible for creating it. I will move on after this one last thought. Maybe it is the most discouraging thought of all. There is not a whole lot that any of us can do about it because it is in the hands of others.

So with all of that said, I actually want to address a cliff that our nation is going over which is to me far more significant and receives a lot less attention. It is the moral cliff, or maybe some would state it as the immoral cliff that America seems to be hurdling downward. If this past election says anything, it announces that we live in a different country today than we have ever lived in before. There are so many things where right is now wrong and wrong is now right. Two factors seem to dominate the landscape of America.

The first factor is that we have embraced a new standard, and that standard is what is right for me. There was a day, regardless of a person's faith or non-faith that the Bible, the Word of God, was held in a position of exalted appreciation for moral conduct. No more!



Directions
With Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

A Moral Cliff

It is the standard today of whatever is right for me. So, it has become increasingly prominent that marriage as a sacred trust relationship between a man and a woman continues to be set aside for cohabitation and experimentation as the accepted norm. While life was once viewed as a sacred thing from conception to death, no longer is that true. For now, many across our country embrace the taking of a human life and the thwarting of the development of a child almost at any stage of development toward birth.

Of equal significance is the conversation that seems to be broadening concerning the end of life. Once a person becomes non-productive, what is the point of trying to support and help them survive. The biblical perspective is that from conception to final breath life is a grand and glorious, God-touched event. When it comes to marriage, the biblical perspective of one man and one woman sharing one life is now disdained. No lon-

ger is there any consideration at all for the biblical perspective and even the possible harm that could come from same sex relationships. Do what you want to do! And, of course, the country watched as some states approved the legal use of marijuana. Regardless of the fact that this is a proven gateway drug to increased use of even more powerful mind and mood altering drugs, the people say let's make it available to the population. Truthfully, as you survey the entire mountain range of America, it is not a question of going over the moral cliff so much as it is a matter of how far will we fall until we self-destruct.

But not only is there a change in the standards by which we gauge who we are morally and ethically, there is a change in America over what is actually the goal of life. It seems as though the one thing that is the ultimate gauge of whether something is acceptable to most Americans is does it make me happy. If it does make me happy, it has

got to be good. And if it is not something that makes me happy, it is therefore inherently wrong and evil.

In the recent political season, it became more and more fascinating to hear the competition of ideas of who could provide enough for the American people to make them happy. Each political party provided its own description and somewhat of a definition of the pathway to happiness. One offered to provide enough stuff and the other one offered to have enough opportunities given, but both of them ended up with your life will be better and you can be happier if our candidate is elected. The time was when the goal of Americans was not just to be happy so much as it was to be purposeful. That is a profound change that has taken place in our country. For to live a life of usefulness and purpose, with a sense of responsibility, and even duty is the stuff of which true happiness is made. On the other hand, when happiness and a personal good feeling is your goal in life it is virtually impossible to find enough things, stuff, entertainment, or other people that can enable you to achieve it. So in some ways, it seems as though we have fallen off of the moral cliff into an immoral pit. But unlike the fiscal cliff, there is something that you and I can do individually and personally.

Regardless of what anybody else does and regardless of the rest of the population, we, you and I, can turn to God. We can become lights in the darkness. We can become difference makers in the world. It is not necessary for us to curse the darkness, scream, and yell about the situation that we are in, but we can be the difference looking to God, following Him, and offering hope, help, and life in our wonderful Lord Jesus.

The author can be contacted at jfutral@mcb.org.

BSU crew keeps eyes on goal during trashy enterprise

By Lanie King
Correspondent

Students at the University of Mississippi's Baptist Student Union (BSU) have traded trash for cash to raise money for summer missions.

The Grove, Ole Miss' notorious ten-acre site for tailgaters at the center of the Oxford campus, is always covered with plastic plates, fried chicken, leftover cookies, and everything in between after a home football game. BSU students have had the unique opportunity to partner with the university's landscaping services to clean the Grove in the evenings after home games and raise money for student summer missions.

The BSU has participated in Grove cleanup for eight years. The school's landscaping employees have not always had the extra hands that BSU brings for the job. Jeff McManus, the university's director of landscape, airport, and golf services, said they cleaned the Grove on Sunday mornings in the past and spent eight to 14 hours clearing 40-50 tons of garbage.

"With BSU here, we're working shorter hours. Our staff is not beaten down after every ball game," said McManus about the two-to-six-hour cleanups with the extra help. "When BSU comes in



DIRTY JOB — Ole Miss Baptist Student Union (BSU) members Kyle Tanner (left), a business major and member of First Church, Oxford, and Tucker Stafford, a civil engineering major and member of Harrisburg Church, Tupelo, work together to clean the Grove, the popular football game day tailgating spot on the campus in Oxford, after the Texas game on Sept. 15. Funds raised by the students help fund BSU summer missions. The BSUers picked up a record 87 tons of refuse after the Texas game. (BR special photo by Tanner Marquis)

here, it's like a breath of fresh air coming through, and we've got all of these extra hands."

McManus said the students not only bring a good work ethic each night, but they meet the

challenge with a good attitude as well. "The BSU students have definitely been a Godsend so to speak, and we have been blessed by them and really appreciate the value they bring to the cam-

pus. They are a big moral boost to our guys. They always have a good attitude."

Blake Johnson, a senior journalism major from Houston, Texas, who is very active in the BSU, said he believes students' optimism through the long hours and late nights comes from a desire to minister to the campus and an awareness that they are raising money to send students nationally and internationally for summer missions.

"We think to ourselves, 'I'm doing this to spread a message, and I'm doing this to raise money to spread that message,'" said Johnson, a member of The Life Church in Oxford, a church plant sponsored by First Church, Oxford, ONE8 Network; and the Margaret Lackey State Missions Offering.

Johnson also said that BSU students want to ultimately bring glory to God, and they know that their strength comes from Christ — especially during Grove cleanup after Ole Miss played the University of Texas on Sept. 15. Students began the five-hour task at 1:30 a.m., and picked up a record 87 tons of garbage.

"I was thinking Jesus. That was all I had to run off of, and I think we were all thinking the same thing," Johnson said. "I think that

says a lot about our students that we didn't give up."

McManus said that he and others also notice that BSU students are spurred by something greater. "They seem to have a higher purpose and a higher calling for what they are doing, and it's not just about getting the task done. They do a great job with it. They feel they're contributing to a bigger cause."

Students also enjoy the time together during Grove cleanup. "One of my favorite parts is just the idea of the fellowship that you get out there," Johnson said.

With the last campus game of the 2012 football season completed on Nov. 24, McManus looks forward to Grove cleanup next season despite six home football games scheduled in a row.

"I think BSU will step up to the challenge again," he said. "I'm not fearful at all because I know we have a great partnership with them."

Author Lanie King, currently serving as BSU president at Ole Miss, is a junior journalism major from Corinth and a member of North Oxford Church, Oxford. Photographer Tanner Marquis is a junior international security major and a member of First Church, Oxford.

'Tune up' required before couple could fulfill China dream

BEIJING, China (BP) — When Steve (not his real name) was diagnosed with prostate cancer just before he and his wife Lisa (not her real name) were planning to move to China, some friends took it as a sign.

"People [said], 'I guess you are not supposed to be going overseas,'" Steve recalled. "I said, 'No, I think I am just getting a tune-up here.'"

Treatment for the illness caused a year's delay in their plans, but it didn't deter the middle-aged couple. At a time when most of their generation are deciding where to settle for their golden years, Steve and Lisa saw these years as a golden opportunity.

During an earlier visit with friends who work in another part of China, Steve and Lisa opened their hearts to the idea of sharing Jesus Christ in China as well. "Every day we just saw the Lord doing things. So halfway through the trip we said we ought to check this out," Steve said.

It was a longer road to the field than they expected. Before they landed in Beijing, Steve completed a seminary degree as well as his cancer treatment. "We can see that that whole year was all part of the plan," Steve said. "We were in a whole different place when that year was over."

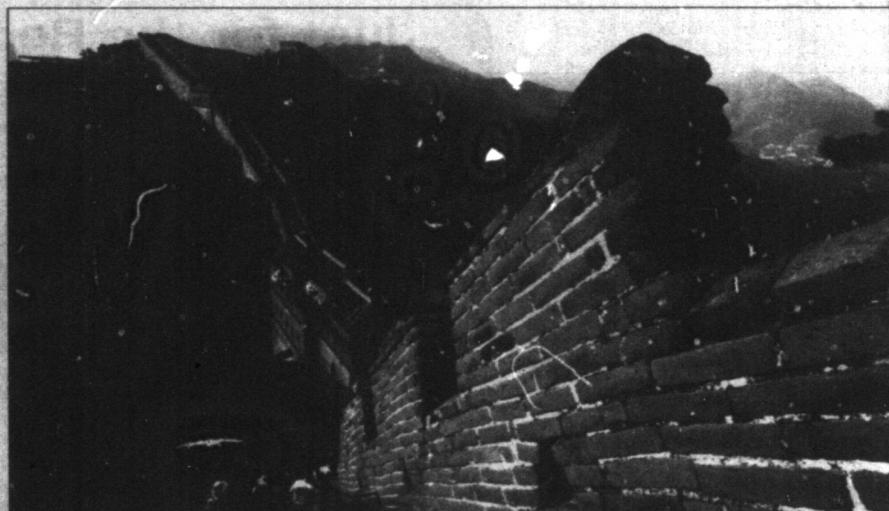
God has used them from the very start, bringing a variety of young people into their lives before they even acquired language

skills. They led several to the Lord, and by the time they'd been in Beijing a year they were discipling a number of young adults. All had come from other provinces in search of employment.

While these relationships fuel Steve and Lisa's enthusiasm, there also are plenty of challenges in their life, perhaps the most daunting being language learning. "Language at our age is really hard," Lisa said. "I took Latin in high school because I wouldn't have to speak it. I didn't take [a language] in college." They invest the time to learn Chinese knowing God will open even more doors for them to be His heart, hands and voice when they can communicate in the heart language of those around them.

The encouraging thing is that I [study so much] and feel like I am just struggling and not doing well, but you know what? However I butcher this language, God is using us and He is bringing people to us," Lisa said. "Having these relationships has made the struggle of language worth it."

It's interesting that the Lord has brought young people into their lives rather than people of their own generation. Lisa points out that these are young people precisely the ages of their own children in the U.S., from whom they are so far away. "It's not us," Lisa said. "God is preparing people and putting them in our path, and it's just amazing. It's just amazing."



GREAT WALL. — The well-preserved Mutianyu section of the Great Wall of China snakes along a ridge about 40 miles northeast of the city's urban core. The Beijing municipality is vast, reaching well into rural areas and as far as the iconic structure. (BP photo)

Workers poised to evangelize as people pour into Beijing

BEIJING, China (BP) — Beijing is an urban center peopled by the rich, politically privileged, and utterly poor.

Outwardly, it's strikingly modern with the Bird's Nest Olympic Stadium and rapidly expanding state-of-the-art subway system. It's ancient, too, with the Forbidden City of Imperial China at its heart. It's blatantly communist with the Soviet-styled Great Hall of the People set in the city center, and capitalist with posh shopping areas shimmering with luxury designer goods nearby.

It's also a magnet, attracting people from throughout the country as they flow in from provinces seeking employment and a better life.

Thomas (not his real name), a Christian worker in Beijing, sees the drawing power of the capital city as a strategic place for reaching out into China's provinces with the Gospel message.

"Beijing is a city that breathes people," Thomas explains. "Every day hundreds of thousands of people travel in and out of the city. At peak times there are more than a million travelers per day. Some stay only a few days, yet others stay much longer."

"A few who come are already Christians from two strong Christian areas of China, Henan and Anhui. Most are not and know more about Coca-Cola than Christ. Whether they come as tourists, on business, or looking for some kind of employment, we want all who enter the capital of the Middle Kingdom to learn of the Eternal Kingdom and the Emperor who died on a cross for them."

When Beijing's population hit 19 million in late 2009, it had already surpassed the

government's target to keep the capital's population below 18 million until the year 2020. Government officials are searching for ways to slow the city's growth, as infrastructure can't keep up with the surging population which has now reached more than 20 million.

The size of Beijing doesn't intimidate me," Thomas says. "It's not a mass of humanity. You learn to read it socio-demographically... once you get above a million, it doesn't really make a difference. You look at where you have the relationships."

China is riding the same wave of urbanization as the rest of the globe. The United Nations estimates that by 2050 nearly 70% of the world's 10 billion people will be living in cities, up from only 30% living in cities in 1950. A similar scenario is occurring in China but, as in its economic and industrial development, at a much more rapid pace.

As recently as 1980, less than 20% of China's population lived in cities. In the '80s, Chinese citizens were generally assigned to "work units" and the central government largely restricted their movements. Opportunities for work in cities nevertheless beckoned and even in the mid-'80s there was a significant percentage of temporary workers lured to cities such as Beijing.

With China's meteoric economic development of recent decades, that "floating population" has increased in the capital and in other cities in China. By the end of 2011, half of China's population was living in cities.

"You have a lot of advantages [as a Christian worker] in the city," Thomas says. He explains that relationships in urban en-

vironments are built through mutual interests rather than proximity.

"In some ways it is very natural," he says. "In some ways, the bigger the city, the better your odds of finding somebody with similar interests. In the city you can't share with everybody. It's not practical and not effective. You find points of common interest. You build relationships. The Gospel spreads along relational lines."

"So when I look at the city I don't see the masses of people," he says. "It's easy to start seeing the pockets. Where do you start in a city? Wherever your relationships take you."

For Thomas, this is in training others to be effective witnesses. For others, it may be connecting with subcultures of artists or musicians.

Change has come to China at such a blistering pace that it is hard to know what is next. Thomas points out that in the Book of Acts, God used persecution to scatter the church. Likewise, he suggests, "God is using economic migration to bring the lost to the church [in the city]."

"Napoleon Bonaparte said, 'When China awakes, the world will tremble.' In the sovereignty of God, as countries rise and fall, God is bringing China to the center stage of world history. It's not a question of 'Will China rise?' It's a question of 'What kind of China will it be?'

Those fields of harvest are rice paddies. They're longing for the Gospel and they're coming to us, even here in the city."

Editor's note: Beijing is the focus of 2012 International Mission Study (wmu.com/Beijing).

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Just for the Record



FELLOWSHIP CHURCH, STARKVILLE, recently elected three new deacons. Shown are Justin Chambers, John Kemp, pastor Dickie Bryan, Scott Beasley, and Wallace Beasley (guest pastor and father of Scott).



HARMONY CHURCH, CLARKE COUNTY, recently held deacon ordination services for Ernie Manning. Shown is pastor Norman Robinson and Manning.



FIRST CHURCH, TERRY, held their children's summer camp for 1st - 6th graders July 18 - 21 at the Woodmen of the World camp near Hattiesburg. A total of 91 children and adult leaders participated.



THE ACTEENS OF TYLERTOWN CHURCH, TYLERTOWN, designed memorial and honorarium angels in December. For information on the angels, call (601) 876-3436 or 303-7193. Front row: Makalah Wand, April Dixon, Brittney Nettles, Mary Elizabeth Stringer, and Tess Wood; back row: Abby Brooks, Rachel McKee, Paige Harvey, Laura Lee Dyer, Hyann Phillips, and Naomi Beard.

Lula McCaa recently retired after 32 years as ministry assistant at **ROCKY CREEK CHURCH, LUCEDALE**. Sept. 30 was dedicated as Lula McCaa Day at the church, and she was honored during the worship hour and with a reception that afternoon. Shown are Gregg Pitts, McCaa, Marshall Stevens, and Nancy Pitts.

In other Church News:

► **Doty Springs Church, Attala Association**, held a children's dedication service Nov. 18 for Morgan Kinley Norwood and Mileigh Kate Norwood, daughters of Daniel and LeighAnn Norwood; and Natalee Shea Massey, daughter of Jonathan and Sharon Massey. Ralph Hunt, pastor.

► The puppet ministry of **Neshoba Church, Union**, will present the program, **Gifts**, Dec. 12, 6:30 p.m., and again for the church's senior adults Dec. 16.

► **Mt. Pisgah Church, Carroll County**, celebrated its first Sunday back in its sanctuary after enlarging and renovations.

► **Navilla Church, McComb**, is sponsoring a December to Remember Monday nights in December, with each Monday at 7 p.m. featuring a missionary speaker, special music, and worship. Dec. 3 - Russell and Melinda Kyzar; Dec. 10 - Alvin and Mary Doyle; Dec. 17 - Floyd and Sylvia Wingo; and candlelight communion service Dec. 24.



NEW PROSPECT CHURCH, OXFORD, ordained Stacy Watkins to the gospel ministry Nov. 18. Shown, from left, are Jim Burke, Tommy Wall, Watkins, Martha Watkins, Ken White, and Curtis Ferrel. Watkins was called as pastor of Driver's Flat Church, Calhoun County.



VANILLA CHURCH, MONTICELLO, recently ordained Marcus Killingsworth as deacon. Shown are pastor Lee Falter, Killingsworth, and Vanessa and Walker Killingsworth.



CALVARY CHURCH, BOGUE CHITTO, sponsored a Trunk or Treat recently. Shown are some of the children participating. Hal Hatten, pastor.



College News



The Carey Chorale and Oratorio Choir performed hymns of praise during the program A Service of Thanksgiving presented by the **WILLIAM CAREY UNIVERSITY** Winters School of Music on November 15 in Smith Auditorium.



MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE'S Lynn Etheridge received a top honor as the state's Licensed Professional Counselor of the Year. The Mississippi Licensed Professional Counselors Association named Etheridge the recipient of the award at its annual meeting in early November. Founded in 2000, the Hattiesburg-based group is a professional organization devoted to advancing the practice of mental health counseling in Mississippi. Etheridge works as a counselor in the MC Student Counseling and Disability Services Office on the fourth floor of Alumni Hall.



The **MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE** chapter of Omicron Delta Kappa inducted nearly 40 student leaders this fall. Founded nearly a century ago in Lexington, Virginia, Omicron Delta Kappa is a growing leadership honor society on hundreds of colleges nationwide. The officers include: president Zach Schurch, a biology/medical science major from Starkville, Ashley Howard, the ODK service chair from Madison, and secretary Briana Pearson, an elementary education major from Brandon. Scott Lee serves as the new vice president and will take over as president next year.

Truth is not relative.

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Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

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2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name. (John 3:18)
If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

Staff Changes



FREDONIA CHURCH, NEW ALBANY, has called Chris Madison as pastor. Madison was born and raised in Knoxville, Tenn., attended the University of Tennessee, and graduated from Southwestern Seminary with a Master of Divinity in 1995. He comes with his family, Emily and Luke.

In other Staff Changes News:

► **Society Hill Church, Oakvale**, has called Jake Staten as pastor.

Believers having an impact on Niamey

NIAMEY, Niger (BP) — When Ibrahim's wife died, his Songhai community refused to bury her because she was a Christian. She, like Ibrahim and other believers, faced daily persecution from their Muslim neighbors. Most Songhai believers do.

"We'll treat your wife like we would a dog or a donkey. She's just an animal that should rot," local leaders told Ibrahim.

The Songhai people are primarily Muslim with many beliefs rooted in animism. International Mission Board missionary John Smythe (not his real name) and his wife spent three years sharing the Gospel and discipling Songhai believers in Ibrahim's village.

One of Smythe's greatest fears in leaving the village was that the Songhai church might crumble.

Soon after they left, Ibrahim faced the huge challenge of defending his faith while grieving for his wife. Determined to bury his wife, Ibrahim began digging her grave as Muslim villagers yelled insults at him. When his Christian brothers heard what he was doing, they came to help. That day was a turning point for the Songhai believers as they united to be His heart, His hands, and His voice.

One of Ibrahim's close friends, Boubacar, commented that he greatly admired Ibrahim's loyalty to Christ that day. Boubacar is a follower of Christ who experienced a radical transformation. Once a gang leader who had demonstrated hostility toward missionaries in his village, he felt an internal struggle to accept or deny God's Truth one night. He decided to become a Christian, and his past life quickly became history.

The Songhai church is small but full of dedicated believers like Ibrahim and Boubacar who cling to the Gospel. Thanks to the Little Moon Christmas Offering, the Smythes helped lay a solid foundation for the church to grow in their village before moving on. They also left audio Bible recordings the church depends on to hear the Word of God as they meet to study and discuss the Gospel.

The church has continued to grow and understand what it means to be the church: loving one another, sharing what they have with one another," says Smythe. "They have their challenges just as every church has its challenges, but they're facing those with prayer and through God's Word. Their greatest desire is that all their village will know the name of Christ."



UNDETERRED — The few Christians in this small Songhai village in Niger face persecution on a daily basis from their Islamic neighbors. This has not stopped them from meeting together to share God's Word and pray for one another. (BP photo)

Niger believers stand tall amidst persecution

NIAMEY, Niger (BP) — Timbuktu. The name inspires images of far-away lands, mythical realms, and immense wealth.

Many people are unaware the city actually does exist. Timbuktu was only one of a myriad of splendid cities within the Songhai Empire. For more than two centuries, the Songhai dynasty ruled most of central West Africa, supported by a flourishing trade in gold and salt.

"They were a rare combination of military and mystic might. They had these great warriors, but they also were these sorcerers and magicians who controlled the spirits and could master the spirits of the river," says John Smythe (not his real name) an International Mission Board missionary who's been working among the Songhai of Niger since 2006.

Ruled by a dynasty of Muslim kings, the empire expanded through a combination of practical politics and holy war. The meteoric rise of the empire was matched by its sudden invasion and downfall in 1591.

Modern Songhai are mainly subsistence farmers, coaxing millet and rice out of the clay of the Niger River valley. It's a land of flat-topped hills and wide, washed-down valleys with deep, rain-cut channels between. Pale red clay and dark brown stone contrast oddly, like a bizarre sand painting.

Songhai villages consist of mud-brick houses. Walls surround spacious, if bare, yards. Trash litters the streets. There is no other place for it. Animals wander wherever acacia fences do not keep them out. Village life is highlighted by scent. The heat beats out the odor of moist sand and green growth. The smell of sweat and wood smoke is prevalent.

"Community is life" to the Songhai, explains Smythe. "They understand that tomorrow, I might not have enough rice to

feed my family, so I'd better rely on the community."

While officially Muslim, the Songhai generally practice animism alongside daily prayers and reciting the Quran. "There are still spirit-possession ceremonies. ... They are involved in all sorts of witchcraft," says Smythe. Less than one percent of the population is Christian.

Out of the ruins of vanished empires and ancient superstitions, however, a new kingdom is being built among the Songhai, shares Smythe. "A kingdom not built with human hands, a kingdom that's being built by God made out of living stones."

This kingdom has not been built without struggle. According to Smythe, Songhai conversion is "a traumatic experience." Those who step outside of accepted practices are ostracized, even exiled, by their communities.

Many villagers refuse to buy or sell with a Christian convert, and family members often shun believers. Pressure to return to the old ways comes from all directions.

One new believer must now eat outside every time he visits his in-laws, as they regard non-Muslims as unclean. Another told his family of his conversion and returned home that night to find all his possessions in a bag outside.

Believers are often told, "Only white people can be Christians."

The harshest confrontation came after Smythe and his family moved away from the small town where they had been ministering for three years, when a believer's wife died suddenly. Ibrahim had been a dedicated Muslim who prayed five times daily, gave charity, and donated animals for religious festivals.

"I thought in my heart if I [did these things], I was receiving forgiveness," he says. "I could never know in my heart ... if I was being forgiven or not."

After repeatedly dreaming of a

light "that was Jesus Christ" coming between him and enveloping darkness, Ibrahim became a determined Christian despite rejection by his neighbors and refusal of business. His dedication and encouragement soon led his wife to Christ as well.

When his wife died, the village leaders, noting neither Ibrahim nor his wife were Muslim, refused to have her buried, claiming she would be treated like an animal and left to rot. Only if Ibrahim confessed Islam would his wife be buried and prayed for as culturally required.

Ibrahim refused and set out to bury his wife alone, but the other believers rallied around him and came to his aid.

This unity in the face of cruel rejection was a turning point for the local church. It demonstrated the church could endure, even without the Smythes' presence. "It was [a] testimony that, 'We are not going to go back to our old faith, that we're here to stay,'" says Smythe, who now lives two hours away in Niamey, Niger's capital city.

In the face of opposition, the Smythes and their team "literally got to watch history change," as this small group of believers grew into the first church ever seen in the region. That church "has continued to grow and understand what it means to be the church," says Smythe. "They are a true community that gives as anyone has need and shares as anyone has need."

The transformation of believers is apparent to their village. Boubacar, once the "number-one bandit" in town and leader of the local fadah, or gang, was so altered that his friends asked him what medication he was on. He claimed, "My medicine is Jesus Christ."

Boubacar stopped smoking, drinking, and fighting, and even broke off an engagement.

Three days after Boubacar's

conversion, Smythe discovered he intended to take a second wife, a practice common and perfectly acceptable to the Songhai. Smythe, with some unease, shared God's plan for marriage as found in Genesis.

"His eyes just got huge, and I thought, 'Oh man, he's gonna hit me!'" Smythe says, "and he looked at me and said, 'I had no idea God's Word said that.'"

Boubacar went that very day to break off the engagement, despite having already paid the bride price. When asked about his decision, he claimed, "Everything Jesus says, that's what I want to do."

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Clue not available.

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Luke Two: Twenty-eight

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MS POSITIONS

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RISKY DECISION — Nik and Ruth Ripken (not their real names) pray at the Wilson airport in Nairobi, Kenya, where Nik first boarded a small airplane for Somalia not knowing when or if he would return. In the Somalia of the 1990s the Ripkens watched helplessly as many Christians were persecuted and martyred. (BP photo)

Couple sees darkest side of persecution traversing globe

NORTHERN AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST (BP) — Nik and Ruth Ripken (not their real names) have served in some of the toughest areas of Africa. They've known believers who have been martyred for Christ. They've interviewed hundreds of Christians experiencing persecution in more than 70 countries.

After all that, they've learned something about persecution. "The most persecuted person is a lost person who has no access to Jesus," Nik says. "Satan wants to keep people from hearing about Jesus. If he can't do that, he wants to shut you up, to silence your witness."

Most American Christians fall into the second category. They experience no persecution because they tell no one about Jesus. Yet persecution of Jesus' true followers has been normal from New Testament times to our day.

The No. 1 cause? People coming to know Jesus. The key is how to make persecution count for God's glory, as the early Christians did.

The Ripkens learned that truth the hard way. They served in South Africa and Kenya after sensing a call from God in the early 1980s. They experienced the drama — and trauma — of ministry amid racial apartheid, religious and tribal tensions, and other challenges, but nothing prepared them for their next place of service in the country of Somalia.

The overwhelmingly Muslim East African nation was wracked by civil war, chaos and danger in the 1990s, as it is today.

"We fed the hungry. We clothed the naked. We were shot

at. We buried a 16-year-old son," Nik recounts. (Their son was fatally stricken by an asthma attack in Kenya on an Easter Sunday). They watched helplessly as nearly 150 Muslim-background followers of Christ in Somalia were martyred. Four of their closest friends died on a single, terrible day in 1994.

The horror continued, and the Ripkens and other workers were forced out in 1998. They have not been able to return.

The Ripkens realized that many of those martyrs died not just for following Christ, but for being openly identified with outside Christian agencies. Thus began their long-term effort to understand the nature of persecution and how God works through it.

Trying to stop it in every case, or "rescue" every believer experiencing it, is a misunderstanding of religious freedom, they contend. "We need to pray intelligently, not that persecution will increase, but that the peoples of the earth have access to Jesus — all of them," Nik explains.

"When that happens, persecution is going to be a reality. Sometimes God needs to have Joseph in Pharaoh's prison for a purpose. Historically and biblically, persecution is normal. In many places today it authenticates the faith. So persecution is not something you run toward or run away from. Persecution just is. It's what you make of it that counts."

Now based in Northern Africa and the Middle East, Nik and Ruth specialize in training and research to help the global body of Christ, including International Mission

Board workers and Southern Baptist churches, understand effective Gospel witness and church planting in environments where persecution is the norm.

Everywhere they go in the world, they meet Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others hungry to know about God. "Every time we send a missionary through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, we're saying, 'We will not stop until every man, woman, boy, and girl on earth has access to Jesus,'" Nik says. "Being His heart, His hands, and His voice means we're representing Jesus among all the nations."

The nations are often much closer than we think. Immigrants arriving in America these days include people who are hard to reach with the Gospel in their home countries. Here, they can be reached by crossing the street — but Christians have to cross the street.

"God is giving us a second chance. He is bringing the nations to us," Nik says, but we're running from the nations in our midst. Until we get over our fear, we will not welcome the lost in our midst. [Often] these people are lonely and isolated. Get out of your church. Go to their homes. Invite them to your home. Shop where they shop.

"We're in a free country, and yet we're not exercising our freedom to witness to the nations in our midst. Satan has deceived us. Witnessing is not about freedom. It's not about being in a free country. Witness is about obedience. Do I have the courage to suffer the consequences of exercising my freedom to share Jesus?"



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EGYPT

cont. from p. 1

more job opportunities.

Believing education was key to a better future, Joseph was determined to go to school. His parents sent him back to Asyut to live with his grandmother during the school year until he finished high school.

It was during his teens that Joseph began attending a Bible study. As he read the Word, Joseph felt God transforming his life in more ways than one. He realized his worth in Christ was greater than his circumstances in the dump. At 18, he became a believer and a mentee of the study group leader. He also began attending a nearby seminary.

It was around this time that a neighborhood girl caught Joseph's eye. Hiba (not her

real name), who was born and raised in the garbage village, was a Christian when she met Joseph at a home Bible study. The two dated for five years before marrying.

As Joseph studied the Bible, the verses about God choosing the poor of the world to shame the rich resonated with him. Though he and Hiba had dreams of bettering their circumstances, God made it clear He wanted them to serve among their community.

"God put in my heart to build a church here," Joseph says. "That has been my dream since [I became a believer] 10 years ago."

In June 2011, Joseph saw his dream realized. He and several other believers began building a church from discarded cinderblocks and mud. A local Egyptian Baptist church heard about the undertaking and offered leadership and financial support.

"God created us as a church, not to be closed in on ourselves but to serve the society around us. The people here are very precious to our Lord."

**Joseph
Egyptian pastor**

On Dec. 30, 2011, the church held its first worship service under a partial roof. Since that first service, three people have prayed to receive Christ. This gives Southern Baptists reason to celebrate.

Southern Baptist workers in North Africa and the Middle East are training Joseph and local pastors in outreach and evangelism and providing them with needed resources to support church plants.

In fact, Joseph's church is but one of many in a rich

history of Baptist ministry in Egypt. "Southern Baptists were very influential through the Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon [Christmas Offering]," says Ron Robinson (not his real name), a Christian worker who served in Egypt for 29 years and witnessed the beginning of Baptist work.

"When we first went [to Egypt], the work was evangelism that resulted in churches. That was our statement."

The work has led to a vital impact on Egyptian churches, which are answering the call to reach their own people. "Now we have partners on the ground near cultural believers who are very capable of sharing the Gospel and dreaming of reaching their country and communities for the Lord," says Robinson.

Those partners include Joseph. He has more big dreams for his neighborhood. He

hopes to raise enough money to finish the church building, which will take about three months to complete. In addition to bringing water and electricity to the entire village, he wants his slum to be legally recognized as a community by the government in Cairo.

His continued prayer is to demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ to all. "In the middle of all this [garbage], where a person could be psychologically broken and worn out, I know and believe that Jesus loves the people and is looking for them. I have lived this," he says.

"God created us as a church, not to be closed in on ourselves but to serve the society around us," he adds. "The people here are very precious to our Lord."

No matter where they build their houses.



HARD DAY'S WORK — Farmers in an indigenous tribe of South America work their crops by hand. They dance and hold religious ceremonies on the small mountain in the background. (BP photo)

UNREACHED

cont. from p. 1

beginning their work among them — to be His heart, His hands, and His voice.

Pray that Grace's people truly will "win" and have the

opportunity to hear about their Savior. Pray that your church will be one to embrace an unengaged, unreached people group that might not otherwise hear the Gospel. To learn how, visit call2embrace.org.

Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital

photos may be used if submitted as a JPEG file via either e-mail, CD or DVD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lit. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items are generally not publishable. Photographs can not be returned. Please do not attach photos with tape or staples.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape-, building-, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis.

Submit news and photographs to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

Exposing a Broken Relationship • Hosea 1:1-2; 2:2-5; 3:1-5

If there is any subject with which people are familiar with it is broken relationships. We experience these in our families, in the work place, and even in our churches. As we begin our study of the book of Hosea, we need to be reminded that our relationship with God can be in a broken state also. Some Bible scholars believe that Gomer was not promiscuous when he married her but became that way later. I prefer, like most Bible scholars, to take a literal view of our passage. God commanded Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman, end of that part of the story. Of all relationships we experience, the marriage relationship is one with which we all are familiar. Scripture often uses it to describe the relationship that exists between God and His people. God is preparing to make a huge point with His people and I believe that point is most relevant to His people today.

Something's Not Right Here (Hosea 1:1-2)

In verse 2 of chapter 1 we find God's instruction to Hosea. These instructions beg us to ask the question; how can a Holy God ask His prophet to marry a promiscuous woman? The answer might lie in the fact that we cannot know what is in the mind of God, or it might lie in the fact that throughout history God uses whomever He chooses to accomplish

His will, whether they believe in Him or not. In light of our present world conditions, this is a fact we need to remember. Many are fearful in our day but God is still in control and will accomplish what He desires.

Our story of Hosea's marriage to Gomer gets even more unusual when they have children and begin naming them.

They had a son named "Jezreel", a daughter named "No Compassion" and another son named "Not My People". In the names of Hosea and Gomer's children lies the beginning of God's message to His children. Jezreel is the name of the valley that separates the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. It is the scene of the slaughter of King Ahab and Jezebel. (II Kings 9:24- 10:11) King Ahab and Jezebel's sin was turning away from God and worshiping Baal and other manmade gods. The significance of "No Compassion" is that God would no longer tolerate Israel's sin and He was going to allow them to suffer for their sin. The name "Not My People" speaks

for itself. God was removing His name from among the people. Through these names the children of Israel received a powerful message from God telling them they were going to suffer the same

fate as Ahab and Jezebel did in the Valley of Jezreel. God reveals to them that He has not ignored their sin and will punish

them for their unfaithfulness.

Your Sins Will Come Out (Hosea 2:2-5)

As we begin to look at Hosea 2, we see the comparison of Hosea's marriage to Gomer and the covenant relationship God has made with His children. Hosea implores his children to stay away from the ways of their promiscuous mother. In the larger picture Hosea is sending God's message to His people. Like Gomer they have chosen to ignore God and have aligned themselves with false gods and Baal worshipers. Instead of relying on God as their provider, they

are putting their trust in other things. Hosea gives the people the stern message that God is going to expose their sin just like the sin of Gomer's adultery is known to everyone. He reminds them that their only hope lies in the confession of their sin before God. Confession is literally agreeing with God about our sinfulness and through confession restoration occurs.

Redemption Carries A Price (Hosea 3:1-5)

In chapter 3 God again, as He has many times in the history of His children, shows His unfailing love for them. He instructs Hosea to go to Gomer and show love to her even though she has not been faithful to him. What an incredible picture of God's unfailing love. Time and time again our sin separates us from God but He stands ready to redeem us when we come to Him in repentance. New Testament passages like Ephesians 1:7 and 1 Peter 1:18-19 remind us that God's redemption plan was set forth before creation and will be culminated with the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross.

Dedmon is Associate Pastor for Education/Outreach at Brandon Church, Brandon.

Yahweh Our God • Exodus 6:2-13; 15:1-21

In Exodus 3, the bright light from the burning bush illuminated the mind of Moses and enlightened his heart to understand that he was communicating directly with the Creator/Covenant Maker Himself. God called Moses from the bush and sent him to speak to Pharaoh concerning the plight of the Hebrew people who had been in bondage in Egypt for over 400 years. Again and again, Pharaoh refuses to let the people go. During their first encounter (recorded in Exodus 5:2), Pharaoh asks Moses the exact question this series of lessons will attempt to answer: "Who is the LORD?" In other words, Pharaoh was asking, "Who is this YAHWEH? Who is this I Am that I Am?"

In Exodus 6, God continues to connect the covenant dots for Moses. First, God reminds Moses that He personally established His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants. Moses was one of those descendants. Second, God declares to Moses that He has faithfully remembered His covenant and has come to use Moses to deliver His people in fulfillment of His promise made to Abraham.

Through seven "I will..." statements, God assures Moses of His presence and power and promised victory over Pharaoh. By His Name, God declares: I will

bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians. I will deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched hand. I will receive you as my own people. I will be your God. I will bring you into the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I will give you this land as a possession. These seven statements in Exodus 6:6-8 are prefaced and concluded with the words, "I Am the LORD."

God's name stands alone! In my "simple faith" grammar book, the very name "God" comprises a complete sentence, qualifying both as a noun and a verb. God is and God acts. God has always existed and God has always been actively working. God will "never not" exist and God will "never not" accomplish His purpose. The Covenant Maker is the Covenant Keeper. God will fulfill every one of His promises. His Name is the proof: The Covenant Name of God is "YAHWEH."

At creation, we are introduced to

"Elohim." That Hebrew name is written as "God" and appears almost 2000 times in the Old Testament. Another Hebrew name for God appearing over 400 times in the Old Testament is "Adonai" which is defined as lord/master and written as "Lord." God appeared to Moses as YAHWEH, which has been translated as "I Am Who I AM" and "I will be Who (and what) I always have been."

YAHWEH is usually written as "L O R D" and can be found over 6000 times in the Old Testament.

Once would be enough! God is so infinitely wonderful that no single name could perfectly describe Him. There are many other names in scripture which reveal the nature of God. Elohim, YAHWEH and Adonai are the big three. In light of His greatness, all other gods are just little "g's."

Moses wrote the first Rock song. Let's "sing along with MO" in Exodus 15. After the ten plagues and the successful crossing of the Red Sea, Moses'

Rock song lyrics celebrate the dead man float of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. They sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like Thee among the gods, O LORD? Who is like Thee? Of course, the unchallenged answer to that question is, "No one!"

In response to the seven "I will..." statements of YAHWEH, Moses sang about six "I will..." declarations made by Pharaoh: "The enemy said, "I will pursue. I will overtake. I will divide the spoil. I will gratify my desire to destroy. I will draw out my sword. I will destroy them with my hand." The perfect seven of YAHWEH trumps the pitiful six of the enemy of His people (see Exodus 15:9).

The spoken letter "H" in both Hebrew and English alphabets yields a breathy sound. "YAHWEH" is a breathy word. "Elohim" is a breathy word. "Adonai" begins with a breath. In Genesis 2:7, we read that YAHWEH Elohim breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul. YAHWEH our God is as close as our own next breath. He never forsakes us. His promises made are His promises kept. Our covenant making God is a covenant keeping God. YAHWEH is God.

Brown is the staff evangelist at First Church, Richland.

Revivals & Homecomings

► Cold Springs Church, Collierville: Centennial Homecoming

Celebration, Dec. 8; worship, 10 a.m.; covered dish lun-

cheon, noon, followed by afternoon singing; anyone wishing to sing can contact Anita Fairchild at (601) 517-3843; Jeff Walker, speaker; West Garner, pastor.

► Conehatta Church, Conehatta: Revival, Dec. 2 - 5; Tommy Anderson, speaker; Steve & Becky Carver, music; Jimmy Jones, pastor; for more information, call (601) 479-1118.

► Moak's Creek Church, Summit: Homecoming - harvest service, Dec. 2; services, 10:30 a.m., followed by lunch; Wayne Hudson, speaker; Pat Rice, music; Mike Alexander, pastor.

Cancer can't keep missionaries from Kingdom service

DURBAN, South Africa — Roger Hesch should be dead. After stage four bone marrow cancer decimated his body, his recovery journey included several life-threatening setbacks each of which should have overpowered his ravaged immune system.

Doctor after doctor told him the chances of survival were next to nothing, but God had more for Roger to do.

After graduating from high school in his hometown of Little Falls, Minn., Roger spent a year in Johannesburg, South Africa, as part of an international exchange program that exposed him "to the bigger world," he said.

He and his wife Meg met while attending college in Minneapolis and were married in 1980. Early on, the couple made a commitment to say "yes" to God's leading, regardless of what that meant. They said "yes" to Roger attending seminary and pastoring two Southern Baptist churches.

"In January 1986, I was speaking on the Great Commission and while I was preaching, God said, 'You can't encourage other people to do what you are not willing to do,'" Roger recalled. It was then the couple said "yes" to serving overseas as International Mission Board missionaries.

"We said we'll go where other people can't or won't go," Roger said. That led them to live in a dangerous country in sub-Saharan Africa with few missionaries. Roger was even wrongfully imprisoned for a week but he and Meg remained obedient, seeing 70 churches multiply to 500 in about six years.

It was after a move to North Africa to pastor an international church that Roger and his family, which now included three children, would face their biggest challenge.

Roger was coaching his daughter's school basketball team in 1990 when he began to lose movement, first in his right arm and then in his left arm. North African doctors could not diagnose the problem so they sent him to London.

Doctors there diagnosed him with stage four cancer, meaning it had spread to other organs and was considered incurable. Another concern was a vertebra pinching his spinal cord. Doctors worried the weakened and brittle bones in Roger's neck may collapse, snapping his spinal cord.

Within a week the Heschies were back in Minneapolis for Roger to begin chemotherapy. He also had a metal "halo" screwed



BACK TO WORK — Roger Hesch (standing) battled stage four cancer to a standstill so he could return to the mission field as soon as possible. (BP photo)

into his head to keep his neck upright.

"He was in [the halo] for four months," Meg said. "His head could never touch the pillow because it was propped up on bars. He couldn't turn his neck and endured it just day by day, such hardship and such suffering."

After four months of chemo, the treatment began to kill his body. His only chance of survival was a bone marrow transplant.

As he lay in the hospital bed following the transplant, Roger told God, "I hurt. I mean, I really hurt," but God reminded Roger of the pain He had endured.

"His response to me was, 'I hung on a cross. You're lying in a hospital bed. You've got cushions behind your head. I had nails in my hands. You get ice chips when your mouth is dry. They gave Me sour vinegar. ... You have doctors and nurses to care for you. I had Roman soldiers to stick spears in Me. ... You've got Me to cry out to and you know I love you, I cried out, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?'

"[God told me] You have a chance now to know just a small measure of the pain that I went through for you, just a small

measure of what I suffered," Roger said.

For the first time, Roger truly understood God's grace. "We always look at cancer and we say, 'Oh, what a terrible thing,'" he said. "I think it's one of the greatest gifts God has ever given me, because I learned so much about God through the experience."

Roger began to recover after the bone marrow transplant, but not without complications. "It was a long road back, physically," he said.

Soon after his release from the hospital with a weak, new immune system, Roger contracted a septic infection which doctors told him kills 50% of healthy people who are unfortunate enough to come down with it. His blood pressure bottomed out and he had to be airlifted to the hospital, but walked out two days later.

"One of the doctors on the team shook his head and said, 'The luckiest man I've ever heard of,' and one of the other attending doctors said, 'No, he's not lucky, he's blessed.' The first thing I said to the doctor when I went there was, 'I know you can't cure me... there are things neither you can control nor I can control, we have to leave

in the hands of God,'" he said.

As Roger continued to recover, he faced one obstacle after another: graft-vs.-host disease, shingles, the fusing of vertebra in his neck, and thickening of the skin on his legs.

"[The doctors] saw over and over and over again God's hand in the way that He did things in my body," Roger explained. "Just the fact that I sit here without steel rods up and down my spine... but I can move. I don't have neck pain. I can play basketball. I can play golf. God did that. The doctors never explained it, there was no medicine that did that. God did that, and I give Him thanks for it."

Following two years of treatment and recovery, and despite physical limitations and setbacks, Roger and his family said "yes" to God once again and headed back overseas in 2001 to Durban, South Africa.

In the summer of 2012, the Heschies left South Africa to begin an IMB role in California. In this three-year assignment, the couple will counsel those interested in serving as overseas missionaries.

As they were preparing for the move, the family received upsetting news yet again. This time, it was Meg who was diagnosed with cancer.

Her heart ached as she watched her husband and children struggle with the news. In addition to facing chemotherapy treatments, Meg also had to deal with a transatlantic move and settling into a different culture.

"Through God's great grace and fantastic support of family and friends, I have weathered well the necessary six rounds of chemo, even in the midst of moving and adapting to our new home and ministry," she said. "As a Christian battling a potentially life-threatening illness, the truth is that I am absolutely in a win-win situation, though naturally my heartstrings anchor me to my precious family, friends, and ministry I love."

Meg's illness is a reality with which her husband is all too familiar. Despite changes, moves, sickness, and new jobs, Roger says the bottom line is knowing God.

"God is faithful and He wants us to know Him, no matter what it takes in our lives..." he said. "Our life is not about doing stuff for God but knowing God, loving God, and living with Him in a relationship."

Cancer battles reinforce couple's resolve, willingness to trust God

When Roger Hesch was diagnosed with incurable bone marrow cancer, he immediately took the issue to the Lord, who told him He was using his sickness to display His glory.

"In the face of his illness, [Roger] set his face like flint, as it says of the Lord Jesus, and [was] just determined to experience this with God... and to not turn away from God in the face of his suffering," said his wife Meg.

However, Meg did not have such an easy time accepting her husband's condition. "I had much more of a struggle coming to terms with it as a wife," she admitted. "I stared widowhood in the face multiple times during the course of his illness. I was facing mountains that were insurmountable to me, and God just helped me to start looking for the answers to how He was bringing glory to Himself through that."

"I think one of the ways He did was through my husband's determined obedience."

Roger said growing up in the States, he was taught to pray for comfort and healing, but through the cancer God changed his outlook.

"The truth is, I was better — I've been better — because God let me be sick," he said. "When people ask me to pray now, my default prayer is not 'God fix them.' My default prayer is 'God, let them see You. Let them see Your grace in whatever this difficulty is.'

"It doesn't matter what my body's like, really. My body's been sick, as sick as I suppose anybody thinks it could be, but it's not about the body. God has gifts for all of us that are so much deeper than physical health or a good job or lots of money, just knowing Him when I've got nothing else and hearing Him say, 'I love you.'"



When Meg and Roger met, before they were even dating, Roger told her that God would always be first in his life. He would always love God more than Meg, and he was looking forward to the day when he would be in heaven.

"One of the things that attracted me to him was that Jesus was front and center in his

life in a very clear way, but it was hard when I was so confronted with the possibility that I was going to lose him," Meg said.

Roger survived his near-fatal cancer and the life-threatening conditions that followed, "and he did it for the kids and me," Meg said.

During his sickest times, Roger's marriage vows were something that helped him hold on. "I could have said, 'I can't do this anymore,' but I made a commitment to my wife that I would stay with her in sickness and in health.

"I know most people think that means the well person stays with the sick person, but I was the sick person and I couldn't give up because I'd made a commitment to her, let alone to God and what we were doing."

Meg admits that "if I'd had a list of all the things we have

been through as a couple and in our ministry overseas before we signed on [with IMB], I think I would have turned tail and run the other way."

God knew her capacity to handle suffering and gave Meg strength to meet each challenge as it came. "Suffering is never the school any of us want to go to; it's not the lesson we want to sign up for, but it is one of the key tools God uses to shape and mold human lives," she said.

"It is the tool that He used to mold His own Son and so I think if we are Christ-followers, we're called to be willing to follow in His steps."

Editor's note: Since this story was written, Meg has been diagnosed with stage two cancer. Though it is difficult for her and her family to face cancer again, Meg is "confident that God has blessed purposes for my life each and every day."